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ABSTRACT

Decades of research indicate that when parents take an active part in their children's education, it has a positive impact on their children's academic achievement, attitudes toward learning and school, confidence as a learner, and social behavior. Parents can also help children develop the lifelong learning skills and attitudes they will need in a rapidly changing society. This booklet examines lifelong learning, and provides suggestions for learning activities for parents to engage in with their middle- or junior high school children. Part 1 of the booklet, "Background Information," defines lifelong learning, explains why it is important, and details the characteristics of a lifelong learner with regard to attitudes, learning skills, and an understanding of their own learning styles. Part 2, "Learning Activities for Parents and Children," provides specific ideas for parents to work directly with their young adolescents in the areas of learning styles; development of positive attitudes toward learning; reading; writing; speaking; listening; research and independent learning skills; study skills; learning strategies; and higher-order thinking skills. Part 3 lists resources for parents and includes availability information. Appendices contain essential vocabulary, an assignment organizer, and a list of words commonly used in assignment and test directions. (KB)

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ED 421 270

Research You Can Use Lifelong Learning

Booklet 3

Lifelong Learning Skills for the Middle/Junior High School Student Tips for Parents

PS 026761

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

School Improvement Program

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March 1998

Booklet 3

Lifelong Learning Skills for the Middle/Junior High School Student Tips for Parents

Kathleen Cotton

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

School Improvement Program
Robert E. Blum, Director

Parents: You Can Help Your Child Learn

Decades of research have shown that when parents take an active part in their children's education, it has a very positive effect on

- Academic achievement
- Attitudes toward school and learning
- Self-confidence as a learner
- Social behavior

Parents can support their children's learning in many ways: by attending school functions, participating in parent-teacher conferences, serving on school councils, volunteering in the classroom, and tutoring their children at home.

All these kinds of support are beneficial, but research shows that **children benefit most when parents work directly with them on learning activities at home.**

Research also shows that

- Parents do not have to be highly educated or have a lot of free time in order to help their children learn.
- The earlier a child's parents get involved in his or her education, the more good it does.

Training given to parents by the school often helps them to be more effective in helping their children learn. If your child's school offers training to parents, by all means take advantage of it.

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Other Resources In This Series

You may be interested in getting the other booklets in this Lifelong Learning series:

- *Lifelong Learning Skills for the Preschool/Kindergarten Child: Tips for Parents* (Booklet 1)
- *Lifelong Learning Skills for the Elementary School Child: Tips for Parents* (Booklet 2)
- *From High School Student to Lifelong Learner: Your Route to Independence* (Booklet 4)

and for teachers and principals

- *Education for Lifelong Learning: Literature Synthesis* (Booklet 5)

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Part 1:

Background Information

Research You Can Use: Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning Skills for the Middle/Junior High School Student: Tips for Parents is one of a series of booklets about **lifelong learning**.

It explains what lifelong learning is, why it is important, and what kinds of personal traits, knowledge, and skills it requires.

It also identifies the kinds of learning support activities that can help prepare your child for lifelong learning.

Following this introductory material, you will find many activities you can use with your child to help build the positive learning attitudes and readiness he or she will need for developing lifelong learning skills.

< What is lifelong learning?

To some extent, lifelong learning happens naturally. Throughout our lives, we take in information and merge it with what we already know. We also acquire new skills as we go through life.

Many of us also learn new things more systematically — for example, by receiving training at work or taking a community college class.

Until recently, however, most of us have not *had* to make a concentrated and lifelong effort to increase our knowledge and skills. So we may not have developed the attitudes and specific skills needed for lifelong learning.

Now, things are changing. Today's students may have no choice but to become lifelong learners in order to be successful.

We hear a lot these days about the "information explosion." More information is being produced than ever before, and new technologies continue to make this information more widely available.

< Why is lifelong learning so important?

In most fields of study, information and knowledge are doubling every three to ten years, and a lot of existing information is becoming obsolete.

Work environments are changing rapidly. Today's students can expect to switch—not just *jobs*, but *entire careers*—four or five times during their working lives.

Business and industry leaders talk about needing a new kind of worker, one who can gather, sort, interpret, evaluate, and apply large amounts of information. These workers will need to be more self-reliant and depend less on supervisors to solve problems and make decisions.

Technology has not simplified work. What it has done is to eliminate many low-level jobs and increase the skill levels needed for the jobs that remain.

What makes a person a lifelong learner? >

What kinds of attitudes and skills prepare people for successful lifelong learning?

Let's talk about **attitudes** first. Attitudes of lifelong learners include

Attitudes >

- Curiosity and interest in learning new things
- Confidence in their ability to learn
- Motivation for seeking new learning opportunities
- Willingness to be responsible for their own learning
- Willingness to make mistakes and learn from them
- Persistence in tasks
- Openness to constructive criticism
- Patience

Lifelong learners also have an assortment of learning **skills**, including

Skills >

- *Reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills* that make it possible for them to take in information and express it to others.
- *Research and independent learning skills*, such as being aware of what they need to learn; making and following a learning plan; and identifying, retrieving, and organizing information.
- *Study skills and learning strategies* to understand and remember the new information they acquire.

- *Higher-order thinking skills*, including critical and creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, and other skills that take them beyond memorizing facts and formulas to understanding what they mean and how to use them.
- *"Thinking-about-thinking" skills*. People with these skills understand that there are different ways of mentally tackling new learning material. They stop and reflect now and then on how well they are understanding what they are trying to learn, and they know how to change their mental strategy if they are not "getting it."

During the middle/junior high school years children continue building language and communication skills and begin developing the kinds of learning-to-learn skills that they will use throughout their school years and beyond.

In addition to these attitudes and skills, lifelong learners have a good understanding of their own *learning styles*—their own best ways of learning. At the beginning of the next section are activities to help you identify and expand your child's learning style.

< Understanding learning styles

Part 2:

Learning Activities for Parents and Children

Learning Styles

A person's learning style includes such things as whether he or she learns best from reading, from studying pictures or diagrams, from listening to an oral description, or from doing hands-on activities or moving about.

Learning style also includes such things as the time of day a person learns best; whether silence or soft music is more helpful; whether learning alone or with others is more useful; and factors such as lighting, temperature, and surroundings for study.

Activities such as the following can help to identify your child's main learning style and also help him or her to become familiar with learning through different senses and in different environments.

Have your child help you with the shopping by giving him or her a short list of items to find and add to the shopping cart. Go over the list with the child before he or she begins, pointing out where you need a product in a certain size or brand name.

< Shopping list (reading and hands-on)

People who learn well from touch or motion often benefit from being able to keep their hands moving when viewing or listening to explanations of learning material. Doodling or other tactile activities should not be discouraged unless they interfere with the learning of others.

< Hands in motion (hands-on and movement)

Point out graphs, pie charts, and other information displays in newspapers or magazines and encourage your child to interpret the information. It helps if the subject of the graph or chart is something your child is already interested in.

< Reading graphs and charts (visual)

If your child wants to gesture, pace, or move rhythmically while reading,

memorizing, or doing other learning tasks, allow him or her to do so; some students learn better this way.

Raps and songs (hearing, movement) > Join with your child in making up raps or songs about material he or she is studying and serve as an audience for him or her to perform them.

Sketching (visual and hands-on) > Encourage your child to sketch illustrations along with taking notes in class to see if this helps him or her to learn and remember lessons better.

Reading ahead > If your child is having trouble in a school subject, encourage him or her to do the assigned reading *before* hearing the classroom lecture on the same subject. Suggest that he or she underline or highlight key information.

Teaching siblings > In families where there are two or more children with similar learning styles, encourage the older child help the younger one(s) with school assignments, pointing out that his or her learning style makes him an ideal teacher for the younger sibling(s).

Positive Attitudes Toward Learning

The habits, attitudes, and general outlook of a lifelong learner begin to be developed in during the first years of life.

Those who study lifelong learners find that they usually had parents who

- Held high expectations for their school achievement and behavior.
- Warmly encouraged them to work hard and do their best.
- Were careful not to compare their children's performance with that of other children or try to get them to improve by threatening or punishing them.
- Made plenty of books, magazines and other reading material available.
- Spent time reading nearly every day. Parents can *say* that reading and learning are important in life, but it is much more convincing if the

children see that their parents make time for reading and learning in their own lives.

Take a look at the following suggestions for helping your child build positive attitudes and learning skills. It is not necessary to do all of these things; instead, select and try those that you can and want to do.

Keep as regular a household routine as you can; structure and consistency help children to feel secure. < Routine

As your child gets older, give him or her a few regular household responsibilities. This will help your child to assume more responsibility for his or her own learning as he or she matures. < Responsibilities

Tell your child that you expect him or her to do well in school. Remind him that doing well depends on *effort* much more than on inborn ability. Keep expectations high but realistic by encouraging the child to strive for small improvements. < Expectations

Review your child's homework habits. If necessary, work with him or her to set a time and place for homework. Make sure he or she has all needed materials and equipment, for example, good lighting, reasonable quiet, a desk or table, paper, pencils, art equipment. See the section on Study Skills and Learning Strategies (p.15); it can help you and your child to decide what kind of study area will work best. < Homework

If your child is having trouble with homework, help him or her to break it down into smaller and more manageable tasks. Also, many communities have a homework "hotline" number students can call for help with their assignments. < Homework problems

Make it clear that homework has priority over television watching and other recreational activities. Also, monitor the amount of television watching. Research tells us that children who watch 20 or more hours of television per week generally do not do well in school. < Homework priority

Help your child connect new facts and ideas to things h. or she already knows. For example, if you are explaining that it is a superstition to fear bad luck when a black cat cross one's path, call attention to a superstition he or she already knows, such as the idea that breaking a mirror is bad luck. < Connecting facts

Reading

If we ask what is the most important skill students need to develop in school, most people would agree that it is *reading*—and they would be right. Success in school and in most jobs depends on the ability to read. People need to develop reading skills early in life and use them throughout their lives.

Home library >

Start (or continue to expand) your home library, including a bookcase—or part of one—for your child's books. Encourage him or her to arrange the books by some method, such as subject—sports, animals, and so on.

Silent reading times >

Set times for silent reading at home, and make sure your child has a selection of materials—books or magazines—from which to choose.

Getting reading materials >

Visit secondhand bookstores and garage sales and exchange reading materials with other families to keep costs down.

Crossword puzzles >

Have crossword puzzle books around the house and encourage your child to work the puzzles; this can help to build a strong vocabulary.

When your child wants to discuss with you something he or she has read, the following are good questions to ask:

Questions about reading >

- What was the book (or story, passage, chapter) about?
- What was the most interesting part?
- Was there a part you didn't like? If so, what was it?
- Was there anything in the reading you didn't understand?
- What do you think you will remember the most about the reading?

Reading on the road >

Have books and magazines in the car for your child to look at and read when he or she goes with you for shopping and other errands. When preparing for a family vacation, help your child to stock up on books and magazines of interest to him or her.

Reading in the movies >

When you and your child see movies or television programs together (comedies, dramas, action stories), keep track of situations where reading skills made it possible for the heroes and heroines to succeed—or where *lack* of these skills interfered with someone's success. Discuss these with your child when the movie or program ends.

Appendix A contains a list of words and phrases we all need to know. They direct us to common services or alert us to things that we need to avoid because they are dangerous or forbidden. Middle school and junior high students will be familiar with most of the terms on this list, but it is a good idea to review them to make sure your child understands them.

< Words and phrases we all need to know

If your child has younger siblings, encourage him or her to read to them.

< Reading to siblings

For your child's birthday or other gift-giving occasion, subscribe to a magazine on a subject of interest to him or her. Make sure it's something your child will read and enjoy; it's better to get your child something he or she wants than to "surprise" him or her with something that is not of interest.

< Magazine subscription

If your child is not interested in reading for pleasure, ask a teacher or librarian for assistance in finding reading material on subjects of interest to him or her and at a suitable reading level. Libraries sometimes have sections for "reluctant readers."

< Reluctant readers

Encourage your child to keep a card file or list of books he or she has read. This can be helpful when looking for new reading material or for ideas for a school report.

< List of books read

Writing

Writing skills have always been important, and they still are. Your child will have to complete writing assignments throughout his or her school career to prepare for further education, training, employment, and adult personal life.

Years ago, teachers would give writing assignments; students would turn them in; and teachers would read, correct, and return them with a grade.

< Writing instruction: the old way

Today, teachers are more likely to teach *writing-as-a-process*. This means that the writing process is broken down into several steps. The following description is intended to help you understand why your child may be taking a different approach to writing than you did when you were in school.

< Writing-as-a-process

In the steps of writing-as-a-process,

1. First come *prewriting* activities, where the student gathers ideas and takes notes.

< Prewriting

2. Then comes *drafting*, with the student writing the ideas he or she wants to express. Teachers tell their students not to be too concerned with language "mechanics," such as spelling, at this point. Often, the teacher or a classmate looks over the draft and makes suggestions for improvement.

Revising >

3. During *revising*, the writer makes whatever changes he or she thinks necessary, such as adding or deleting, reorganizing, or rewriting for clarity.

Editing >

4. *Editing* consists of correcting grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as well as making certain that the ideas flow smoothly and logically.

Publication >

5. Finally, *publication* takes place. This includes distributing the finished product to teachers, classmates, parents, and or community members who will read and comment on it.

Whatever writing strategy your child learns in school, there are many things you can do to help him or her become a better writer.

Write stories >

Encourage your child to write stories featuring characters from stories he or she has read. Don't be concerned about errors in grammar, punctuation or spelling when your child is first writing stories; the point is to get ideas down in writing.

Thank-you notes >

Encourage your child to write thank-you notes when he or she receives gifts. Provide help if he or she has trouble getting started.

Write for free things >

When reading magazines and newsletters, keep track of things children can send for through the mail. Help your child to write a letter requesting the item and address the envelope. The book, *Free Things for Kids to Write Away For*,* tells how to send away for a large variety of items.

Help with writing projects >

Children sometimes need help getting started on a school writing assignment. If this happens, work with your child to select a topic, brainstorm ideas, and identify sources of information (including his or her list of books read). Once a paper is drafted, be willing to read it and give comments.

Prewriting help >

When your child has an essay to write for school, help with the "prewriting" stage. This can include discussing the topic with him or her, helping to think of good examples, and offering reminders of events in his or her past that relate to the topic.

Free Things for Kids to Write Away For (64pp.) by Jack Aboff is available from Internet Image Builders, P.O. Box 1120, Sterling, VA 20167-0899. Order #4039. Price $3.98, plus $4.00 handling fee. To order by FAX: 1-800-965-8851. To order online: <www.image-builders.com/bookstore/catalog/book/a-4039.htm>.

Keep a family log or newsletter of events and encourage your child to contribute regularly. Share the family news with extended family members, neighbors, etc.

< Family newsletter

Encourage your child to begin or continue adding to a scrapbook of sports figures, celebrities, animals, foreign countries, food, or other interests. Have him or her cut pictures from magazines, mount them, and then label and write comments about them. As interests change, start a new scrapbook or scrapbook section.

< Scrapbook

Have your child keep a schedule for his or her activities and post it on the refrigerator or other prominent place. Include both regular activities (study time, music lessons, etc.) and special activities (staying overnight with a friend, going on a school field trip, etc.).

< Activity schedule

Offer to read your child's writing assignments, giving praise, asking questions, and calling attention to glaring mistakes. Remind your son or daughter that good writers usually prepare several drafts before they get to a finished product.

< Reviewing assignments

Encourage your child to read his or her writing assignments aloud. This can call attention to mistakes in grammar, as well as problems with meaning or clarity. Offer to listen and provide suggestions.

< Reading aloud

Good questions to ask about any writing project include, Who is your audience—to whom are you writing? Do they have enough background information to understand your essay? What is the purpose of your essay—do you want to explain, instruct, persuade, entertain, etc.? What do you think is the best part? What part would you like to improve?

< Questions about writing projects

Encourage your child to write letters and notes—both on paper and by electronic mail, if available. Offer to look them over and make suggestions.

< Writing letters

Write a paragraph or two, leaving out all the punctuation or remove the punctuation from a magazine or newspaper article. Then have your child supply the correct punctuation. Discuss any points of disagreement, and if you aren't sure how something should be punctuated, have your child ask a teacher.

< Punctuation

Good writing requires something to write about. Give your child experiences that can become topics for writing projects—museum or zoo trips, travel and visits, pursuing a hobby, etc.

< Something to write about

Speaking and Listening

Whether a person is in the classroom, asking or giving directions, or simply talking with family members, speaking and listening skills will remain important throughout life. You can help your child develop these skills during the course of everyday activities.

Respectful listening >

Model respectful listening at home, at the movies, with tour guides, and at school functions. This includes listening to your child. Some tips include

- Let the speaker finish a sentence; don't cut him or her off or interrupt.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Display a pleasant disposition.
- Model a good "listening pose" by looking attentive, nodding or brief verbal feedback (e.g., "I see"), and asking questions for clarification.

Read and record >

If you have access to a tape recorder, have your child tape and listen to his or her voice reading a story or a school paper. After listening, encourage your child record it a second time, attempting to change anything he or she did not like about the first reading. Listen again and praise improvements.

Telephone >

Play a game of "telephone" at home, with each person listening to a phrase or sentence whispered by a family member and then whispering it, in turn, to another family member. As a group, compare the beginning and ending messages. How did the message change from beginning to end? Why do you think the changes happened?

Discussing television >

Form the habit of watching and then discussing educational programs on television; this will help your child build skill in listening and expressing ideas. If your family watches game shows, try to answer questions or solve puzzles along with the contestants.

Oral report practice >

When your child needs to prepare an oral report for school, provide a place for him or her to practice—in private if possible.

Being an audience >

If you have more than one child, encourage listening and speaking skills by having the child or children who are the "audience" for a sibling's report summarize the main points.

Play "Who Am I?" with your child by stating the first letter of the name of a real person or fictional character and allowing your child to ask yes-or-no questions about the person until he or she figures out who it is or has to give up. Then let your child think of someone and you ask questions. This kind of game builds thinking skills as well as speaking and listening skills. Variations: "Where Do I Live?" "What Animal Am I?"

< "Who Am I?"

Pay attention to the kinds of settings or activities that interfere with your child's ability to listen carefully. At times when it is especially important for your child to hear and remember what is being said, try to remove the distractions or remove the child from the distracting environment, whichever is easier.

< Distractions

Encourage your child to be an "active listener" by asking questions for clarification when he or she does not understand what is being said, and by nodding or saying something like "I see," to let the speaker know he or she is listening and understanding.

< Active listening

Research and Independent Learning Skills

Taking responsibility for learning grows out of taking responsibility in other areas of life. As your child grows older, give him or her responsibility for some household and/or childcare tasks.

As your child assumes more responsibilities, allow him or her more privileges, such as setting his or her own bedtime.

Help your child form the habit of preparing for school the evening before. Work with him or her to get clothing, books, and lunch ready for morning. Give your child an alarm clock, and allow him or her to gradually assume responsibility for getting started in the morning.

< Ready for school

If you use the library to find out more about subjects that interest you, your child will learn that using research and library skills are a part of everyday life. Reference materials include maps and globes, drawings, photographs, graphs, and other visual materials, as well as print materials and electronic resources such as those on CD-ROM.

< Use the library

References at home >

Teach your child to use any of the following that you have at home, such as the dictionary, telephone directory, almanac, thesaurus, television schedule, atlas, encyclopedia, CD-ROMs, and others. If you have Internet access, you can find these and many other kinds of resources online.

References worth getting >

Books on Greek and Roman myths and books of famous quotations are very useful general references for students. Look for bargains at second-hand bookstores.

Internet >

If you or a friend have an Internet connection, you and your child can use the Internet to learn about things you are interested in. Some libraries also offer students free Internet access.

Research strategy >

When your child needs to do research for a school report, suggest that he or she decide

- Which references to go to first
- How to keep good notes and thorough documentation
- How to organize notes and other materials so they will be easy to find later
- How much time to allow for each step—researching, writing, and editing the report

Be willing to help with reference ideas or time estimates if asked.

Keep notes >

Give your child a notebook or box to keep notes on subjects he or she has researched and what reference materials were most useful. These notes are likely to be useful for future projects.

Help...but not too much >

If your child needs to prepare a report, notebook, display, collection, model, or other product, help out by looking over his or her work at different points in the project. Give encouragement and call attention to problems such as unclear labeling or misspelled words. However, avoid the temptation to help too much.

Study Skills and Learning Strategies

In the 21st century, having job-specific skills will not be as important as having the ability to learn new things quickly and well. Study skills are tactics for learning and remembering, and learning strategies are groups of these tactics organized into a series of steps for more in-depth learning.

Most children need time to unwind after school and before doing their homework; give your child the opportunity for playtime or a snack before asking him or her to settle down and study.

< Time to unwind

Remember that applying study skills and strategies is most effective when your child has a designated place and time for study. It can also be helpful if you do quiet work yourself during your child's study time.

< Study time

Have your child use a shoebox or other small box to make a "mailbox" with his or her name on it, and place it in his or her study area. The mailbox is for notes from you and other family members and for any mail your child receives.

< "Mailbox"

Make sure your child has a notebook for writing down homework assignments and encourage him or her to use it.

< Assignment notebook

Appendix B of this booklet is an "Assignment Organizer" that your child can use to plan and carry out a learning project. He or she will be able to complete some steps easily, but others might require some suggestions or other help from you. Go over the Assignment Organizer with your child as he or she is coming to the end of a project to make sure that all the steps have been followed.

< Assignment organizer

Knowing when to take a break is a "study skill," too. Encourage your child to take occasional breaks while studying. A good rule-of-thumb is a five-minute break after every half-hour of homework.

< Take a break

Help your child to avoid or minimize things that can interfere with study—noise, room that is too warm or too cold, hunger, tiredness, eating too much sugar or fat, etc.

< Avoid interference

Find out if your child's teacher has given the class "tips" for learning and remembering. If so, learn what they are and reinforce them at home.

< Study tips

Using magazines on subjects of interest to your child, have him or her prac-

tice *skimming* (rapidly going over the article to get a sense of what it is about) and *scanning* (glancing through an article to see if a particular topic is there). For example, you might have your child scan an article on the Olympic Games to see if his or her favorite sport or athlete is mentioned.

Taking and organizing notes >

Have your child practice taking notes while watching a nature program on television. Look at the notes together and organize them into an outline. For example, for a program about animals in different parts of Africa, each different region could be a main idea in the outline, with the animals that live in that region listed underneath.

Transfer skills >

If your child has used a learning skill or strategy successfully in one subject area, encourage him or her to try it again with material from a different subject.

Practice memorizing >

Play games in which your child memorizes something and you quiz him or her. For example, he or she can memorize family's and friends' telephone numbers, statistics related to favorite sports figures (batting averages, point and rebound averages, etc.), state capitals, the planets, names of past teachers, etc.

Summarizing >

Putting an idea in your own words can help you to remember it. Practice this with your child by summing up in your own words something he or she has said, and then have him summarize what you say.

Preparation for tests >

When your child is preparing for a test, use the textbook, worksheets, or notes to quiz him or her on the material. Encourage your child to test him- or herself periodically, too.

Test taking skills >

When your child is preparing for a test, remind him or her to

1. Read all directions carefully.
2. Review key test terms:
   - *Compare* means show similarities and differences.
   - *Define* means explain and give an example.
   - *Outline* means list key information in a structured way.
3. Be alert for terms such as *usually*, *not*, and *only* that suggest how to respond to questions.
4. Find out if there is a penalty for guessing.
5. Skim the whole test before beginning.
6. Answer only what is asked, watching for words that demand thorough responses, such as *explain* and *discuss*.

Appendix C contains a list of words commonly used in assignment or test directions. Go over these words with your child to make sure he or she knows what they mean.

< Common words in directions

Cooperative learning in small groups can be an effective way for children to gain knowledge and skills from one another and to learn teamwork. Encourage your child to engage in cooperative projects—both at your home and at the homes of schoolmates.

< Cooperative learning

Share with your child any "memory tricks" you make up to help yourself remember things. One woman focused on the idea of "robin's egg" to remember the name "Rob Eckstrom," and to remember how to pronounce the name of former Romanian leader Ceaucescu, she thought of a man showing the letter "O" on his chest: "Showchesque."

< Your memory tricks

Have your child try the method known as "SQ4R." SQ4R stands for a series of learning steps: **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**eflect, **R**ecite, **R**eview. Suggest that he or she

< "SQ4R"

- **S**urvey (or skim) the material
- Think up some **Q**uestions that the material can answer
- **R**ead the material
- **R**eflect on (or think over) what he or she has read
- **R**ecite key things that need to be remembered, and finally
- **R**eview the material.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills

You can help your child develop skills for critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and decision making. You can also help your child to understand his or her own thinking processes and to improve them.

Have your child read riddles or "Minute Mysteries" aloud, and work with him or her to figure them out. Ask questions or give hints if your child gets stuck; if it is you who are stuck, ask for a hint or for a rereading of the mystery or riddle.

< Riddles

As you encounter or think of proverbs and sayings, ask your child to explain what he or she thinks they mean. Explain what people generally mean when using such sayings, for example, "A stitch in time saves nine."

< Proverbs

"The early bird gets the worm," "Don't cry over spilled milk," etc.

TV commercials and magazine ads >

Together with your child, take a close look at television commercials and magazine advertisements. Ask your child what the main point of the ad is and whether he or she thinks the ad's message is true. Ask why or why not.

Thought provoking questions >

Ask your child questions that require him or her to think things through. For example, ask if it would be a good thing if every day were Christmas and to explain why or why not. Or ask your child if he or she thinks children should get to choose whether or not they would go to school, and why or why not.

Identify key facts >

Tell your child that newspaper reporters and other journalists are trained to write articles that tell readers "who," "what," "where," "when," and sometimes "why" and "how." Have him or her read an article in the local newspaper and identify what happened, who was involved, and so on.

"What did you learn?" >

Ask your child to tell you one or two new things he or she learned from school projects or personal experiences. Ask if he or she thinks the new learning will be helpful in the future and to explain why or why not. Suggest ways you think the new learning might be useful.

Think out loud >

When you are trying to solve a riddle or puzzle, "think out loud" so that your child can hear you describe the steps you go through in your mind as you work toward a solution. Then have your child speak his or her thoughts aloud while attempting another puzzle or riddle.

You can also ask your child to go back and describe the process he or she followed in coming up with the answer to a problem or riddle.

Positive self talk >

Help your child to form the habit of positive self-talk. Encourage your child to approach a school assignment or test by reminding him- or herself, "I am a smart person and can do this task well," "I can relax and organize my thoughts so as to do well on this," "I have learned a lot on this subject and can write about what I know," etc.

Dealing with distractions >

If your child is having trouble paying attention in school or at home, see if you can identify what is interfering with his or her ability to listen attentively. Does he or she have trouble concentrating when hungry. . . or worried about something . . . or extremely interested in some personal hobby or project? Once you know what the distraction is, you can take

steps to minimize it.

Some teachers of middle school children begin teaching their students how to understand and improve their own thinking. If your child's teacher teaches such lessons, ask what you can do at home to reinforce the new skills your child is building.

< Reinforce thinking skills

When your child begins to learn something new (for school, Scouts, church, hobby, etc.), have him or her put two headings on a sheet of paper—"What I Know about (the subject)" and "What I Want to Learn"—and make a list under each heading. Have him or her indicate with arrows when each "want to learn" item becomes a "what I know."

< New learning

Doing activities from this booklet with your middle or junior high school child can help him or her to succeed in school now and build skills for a lifetime of productive learning.

Other useful resources are listed on the following pages.

Be sure to see the appendices following the resources listing.

Helpful Resources for Parents

Asterisk (*) indicates that the publication may be purchased from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, operated by DynCorp I&ET, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110 Springfield, VA 22153; 1-800-443-ERIC (3742) or 703/440-1400; FAX: 703/440-1408; Internet: <edrs@inet.ed.gov>

*American Association of School Administrators. *Brush Up Your Study Skills: Tips for Students and Parents*. Arlington, VA: AASA, 1995 (ED 381 910).

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Available from AFT Order Department, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20001, 1-800-238-1133. Ask for item 350. 1-9 copies: $.50 each; 10 or more copies: $.40 each.

*Amundson, K. *101 Ways Parents Can Help Students Achieve*. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 1991 (ED 346 973).

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*Association of American Publishers. *Helping Your Child Succeed in School*. New York: Association of American Publishers—School Division, 1989 (ED 350 077).

Available from Association of American Publishers, School Division, 220 East 23rd St., New York, NY 10010. $1.50 for single copy; $1.25 each for 10-99 copies; $1.00 each for 100 or more copies.

Ban, J. R. *Parents Assuring Student Success (PASS): Achievement Made Easy by Learning Together*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service, 1993.

Available from National Educational Service, PO Box 8, Department V2, Bloomington, IN 47402-0008m 800-733-6786. $21.95 (shipping/handling charges waived if prepaid; if not, $3.00 minimum or 7%).

*Cano, L. R. *Helping Your Child Learn: A Parent's Guide = Ayudando a Su Hijo a Aprender: Una Guia para los Padres*. Houston, TX: Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, August 1988 (ED 281 966).

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Available from Bureau for At-Risk Youth, PO Box 760, Plainview, NY 11803-0760, 1-800-99-YOUTH. $1.95 each, ISBN 1-56688-007-6.

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**Spanish Language Briefs for Parents, 1995*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1995 (ED 390 630).

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Available in English and Spanish from National Library of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20208-5721. Or call 1-800-424-1616. Free.

*Vogler, D. E., and Hutchins, D. E. *Parents as Tutors: Minimizing the Homework Hassle*. Alexandria, VA: National Community Education Association, 1988 (ED 338 999).

Available from National Community Education Association, 801 N. Fairfax St., Suite 209, Alexandria, VA 22314. $6.95 each; quantity discounts.

Essential Vocabulary

Adults Only
Antidote
Ask Attendant for Key
Beware
Boys
Bridge Out
Bus Only
Bus Station
Bus Stop
Caution
Closed
Combustible
Condemned
Construction Zone
Contaminated
Curve
Danger
Dangerous Curve
Dead End
Deep Water
Deer/Cattle Crossing
Dentist
Detour
Dim Lights
Dip
Doctor (Dr.)
Do Not Block Driveway
Do Not Cross
Do Not Enter
Do Not Inhale Fumes
Do Not Push
Do Not Refreeze
Do Not Use Near Heat
Do Not Use Near Open Flame
Don't Walk
Down
Drive Carefully
Dynamite
Elevator
Emergency
Emergency Vehicles Only
Employees Only
End Construction
Entrance
Escalator
Exit
Exit Only
Exit Speed 30
Explosives
External Use Only
Falling Rocks
Fire Escape
Fire Extinguisher
First Aid
Flammable
Found
Four-way Stop
Fragile
Freeway
Garage
Gasoline
Gate
Gentlemen
Girls
Handle with Care
Hands Off
Help
High Voltage
Hospital Zone
In
Information
Inspection Station
Instructions
Keep Away
Keep Closed at all Times
Keep Left (Right)
Keep Off (the Grass)
Keep Out
Ladies
Lane Ends
Last Chance for Gas
Left Lane Must Turn Left
Left Turn Only
Left Turn This Signal Only
Live Wires
Loading Zone
MPH
Mechanic on Duty
Men
Men Working
Merge Left
Merging Traffic
No Admittance
No Checks Cashed
No Credit
No Diving
No Dumping
No Fires
No Fishing
No Hunting
No Left Turn
No Loitering
No Minors
No Parking
No Passing
No Pets
No Right Turn
No Right Turn on Red
No Smoking
No Standing

These are commonly used words and phrases that warn or give instructions. Explain these terms to your child (or look them up) and review them occasionally.

No Stopping
No Swimming
No Trespassing
No Turns
Not for Internal Use
Nurse
Office
One Way—Do Not Enter
Open
Out
Out of Order
Pedestrians Prohibited
Playground
Poison/Poisonous
Police
Posted
Post No Bills
Post Office
Private
Private Property
Proceed at Your Own Risk
Pull
Push
Railroad
Restrooms
Resume Speed
Right Lane Must Turn Right
Right Turn Only
Road Closed
Road Ends
Safety First
School Zone
Shallow Water
Shelter
Slide Area
Slippery When Wet
Slow Down
Slower Traffic Keep Right
Smoking Prohibited
Speed Checked by Radar
Steep Grade
Step Down (Up)
Stop
Stop Ahead
Stop for Pedestrians
Stop Motor
Taxi Stand
Thin Ice
This End Up
This Lane May Turn Left
This Side Up
Traffic Circle
Truck Route
Turn On (Off) Lights
Up
Use Before (date)
Use in Well Ventilated Area
Use Low Gear
Use Other Door
Violators Will Be Prosecuted
Walk
Wanted
Warning
Watch Your Step
Wet Paint
Winding Road
Women
Yield
Yield Right of Way

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Assignment Organizer

Task Definition

Name Teacher

What am I supposed to do?

What information do I need in order to do this?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Information-Seeking Strategies

What are the possible sources to find this information?

Which are the best for me to use?

Location and Access

Where will I find these sources?

Who can help me find what I need?

Use of Information

How will I record the information that I find?

__take notes using cards
__take notes on notebook paper
__take notes using a data chart
__draw pictures
__talk into a tape recorder
__other

How will I give credit to my sources?

Write title, author, page number

__on note cards
__on notebook paper
__on data chart

Synthesis

What product or performance will I make to finish my assignment?

How will I give credit to my sources in my final product or performance?

__include a written list (bibliography)
__after the performance, tell which sources I used
__other

Evaluation

How will I know that I have done my best? (All must be checked before the assignment is turned in.)

__What I made to finish the assignment is what I was supposed to do in Task Definition, above.
__Information found in Use of Information matches information needed in Task Definition.
__I gave credit to my sources (even if I used a textbook).
__My work is neat.
__My work is complete and includes my name and the date.

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Commonly Used Words in Assignment and Test Directions

add
after
alike
aloud
alphabet
alphabetical
answer
answers
antonym
around
array
before
begin
beginning
behind
below
beside
blank
bottom
box
circle
color
column
corner
cross out
cut
difference
different
direction
divide
dotted
draw
end
ending
erase
estimate
example
fifth
fill in
first
fold
folder
fourth
glue
hold
homonym
horizontal
how
in between
in front of
last
left
line
make
mark
match
middle
miss
missing
multiply
ninth
opposite
order
over
page
paint
paper
paragraph
part
paste
phrase
picture
plural
prefix
question
read
rhyme
rhyming
right
ring
row
same
say
second
section
sentence
sentences
seventh
silent
silently
singular
sixth
space
spaces
spell
spelling
start
stop
subtract
suffix
tenth
third
top
trace
twice
under
underline
vertical
what
when
where
which
who
why

These are words that appear frequently in directions for assignments and tests. Go over them (or look them up) with your child to make sure he or she understands what they mean.

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